

Q: Good afternoon.

A: Hello!

Q: Today is February 1st, 2018. My name is Helene Tischler. I'm here at the Newton City Hall Law Library with Alfreda Piecuch, who has graciously agreed to be part of Newton Talks Oral History Project, and that's conducted with the Newton Free Library, Historic Newton, and the Newton Senior Center. Thank you so much for being with us, Alfreda.

A: I am pleased to participate.

Q: Thank you. Can you tell us a little bit about where you're from, when you came to Newton, maybe how you chose--or, the United States, and then coming here. Please, let us begin.

A: Well, it's a long and complicated story, actually. So, my dad was actually born in the United States. Three of my grandparents had been here to work in the factories in Manchester, New Hampshire. And all of them went back to Poland.

Q: What years was that?

A: My--it would have been in 1920 that my grandparents returned with my father and two siblings. And they returned to Poland because my grandfather had come down with the flu and nearly died of it, and was so upset and so scared of sort of like, continuing living in tenements, that he gathered his family and took them back to Poland. My father retained his citizenship and after the--World War II, in 1947 he was able to return to the United States. My mother--I was born in 1943--my mother and I were expecting to follow him pretty directly, perhaps six months later or so, as was happening with other families in this kind of a situation, or this kind of a

setup. For whatever reason, it might have been just--I don't know--envy, political move on somebody's part that we were not able--my mother and I--were not able to get a passport--

Q: The visas--

A: My father had a visa for us, but we were not able to get passports. So we remained in Poland for nine and a half years. So I knew my father up to four--age four and a half, and then didn't sort of reunite with him until I was thirteen and a half.

Q: What a difference. Now what part of Poland were you--

A: This is southern Poland. Eastern...southeast of Poland. So, two hours--

Q: What town or city?

A: It's a tiny village that does not--whose name does not exist anymore.

Q: Really? They changed--

A: I actually wrote a book about--

Q: Yes...

A: --of the history of it, and so forth.

Q: What was the name of the--

A: Biatkowka. Biatkowka.

Q: I've never even heard of it.

A: Yes. It is now united with two other villages and has adopted the name of one of them, Moderowka.

Q: Okay. And was there a larger city near you? What was the one closest?

A: Not so very close, particularly given that it was a matter of reaching any--either city by wagon at the time.

Q: Right.

A: I mean, or maybe bicycle or something like that. So we're talking right after the war.

Q: Right.

A: It was my--I don't know if I should be talking so much about this or just--

Q: Yes, absolutely! We want to hear where you're from, what that experience was like, when you first learned English, when you came--what the experience was like leaving your country and so forth. Sure! The background is really important. Absolutely!

A: Okay, well, I did not know a word of English when I came. Not even a "hello."

Q: And you were a teenager then?

A: And I was a teenager. It was a very difficult transition, as you can imagine.

Q: I can imagine.

A: I was coming from this tiny village up in the sort of hills and had never--had had an orange once. I had never had a banana.

Q: Right. It was that it didn't grow there.

A: It didn't grow there, we--

Q: Nobody brought it in.

A: Yes, yes. There was a lot, a lot to get used to. I had very long hair, braided, hair--braids that I could sit on.

Q: Right.

A: When I came here, the style was these curly bobs or whatever. So I was really out of place. Living on a farm with livestock all around and everything. I mean, this is--this was common at the time. There would be chickens sort of in the hallway of the house.

Q: Right, right.

A: There was no bathrooms as such, they were outhouses. Taking baths was not something that was done very often.

Q: You didn't have running water? Then you had to bring the water.

A: Yes, yes. We had a well. And so I remember when I started school here, other kids didn't really want to sort of pair up with me, because I looked a little odd and I probably smelled somewhat. One of the first things that was--that the--we lived in an apartment house--that the owner of the house gave me as a present was a--now I'm having a senior moment--was...

Q: Perfume?

A: No, underarm...deodorant.

Q: Deodorant! Oh my goodness! [Laughter]

A: Underarm deodorant.

Q: Just a little message there.

A: Yes.

Q: Was that here in Newton? Or where did you come when you first--

A: No, it was in Manchester, New Hampshire.

Q: So when you first arrived it was Manchester.

A: Yes. True. Yes. My father had been born in Manchester and he returned to Manchester. My father in Poland learned a trade--he was a wheel-wright.

Q: Right.

A: Yes. He had also gone to school beyond what was the usual sort of level of education.

Q: Yes. And he did that here or in Poland?

A: He did that in Poland.

Q: In Poland. When he went back. Right.

A: Yes. Yes. And--

Q: So you--

A: --but when he came here, I mean, there was the opportunities for--and he himself did not speak English, obviously.

Q: Right.

A: Because at three, he probably was just interacting with his family--

Q: Sure.

A: --and in Poland, he didn't have access to English. So--

Q: So your parents did not speak English when they came.

A: No. No. No.

Q: And you, too, you were starting from scratch.

A: Yes, well, so I--so as I had mentioned, my father came here nine years ahead of us.

Q: Yes. Yes.

A: And eventually with the change in--with the sort of like a shake-up in government, Gomulka, who came from our region, and I guess there were some people that my family made connections with--

Q: Right.

A: --to maybe sort of like swing or in some fashion perhaps pay money in order to eventually get that passport to be able for us to leave. So--but I'm going back and forth here.

Q: No, but that's fine, because life is like that. So what was it like really arriving and then how long were you in Manchester?

A: Well, I was in Manchester throughout--well, when I came here, I was put in--my father actually went to the school administration to sort of get guidance as to where I should be placed in school given that I was already 13 and a half and I did not know any English. So they suggested actually that I was--that I be put in a parochial school, in a Catholic parochial school which was--where the nuns were Polish.

Q: And they were bilingual.

A: And they were bilingual, yes.

Q: Ah.

A: Most of the students were not bilingual, but the nuns were. And so I sort of congratulated myself in that one of the first things that I asked to have translated into English was "speak English to me." And so--because I really very much did not want to have only factory work as my future. And all the people around me--my father was working in a factory, all his friends were working in a factory--I wanted to be able to continue with school. I had always imagined myself in Poland that I would keep going farther to school. And actually my cousins who were more or less my age are pretty educated. My--one of them, she is now retired, but she had been a judge in Poland, so there was opportunities--

Q: Wow. So, highly educated. Yes.

A: Even though these villages were out of the way--

Q: Yes.

A: --education was free under the Communist system--

Q: Right.

A: --and you could really move ahead.

Q: And many women did.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Not always here.

A: Yes. So--

Q: So you learned English with the nuns at the Catholic school?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: And were there other immigrants, other Polish students? Or were you the only one?

A: No, I was pretty much the only one. And the way that I was learning English was really interesting in that I was put in first grade to learn to read. And reading was really a challenge, because in the English system, obviously, the letters don't make sense necessarily. And so I remember the very first word that sort of like broke the mystery for me was the word "John." John. For whatever reason, I just remember myself looking at it and then just saying something. Saying anything. And it was right! [Laughter] And so after that--

Q: So that must have been exciting!

A: Yes. Well I began taking chances.

Q: Right.

A: And maybe not feeling so self-conscious because this--

Q: It's hard being the only one.

A: --just sort of like closing my eyes--well, not quite closing my eyes--but just jumping into it did it.

Q: Yes. Yes. You're right, English doesn't make sense very much.

A: Yeah. So it took--so I was in--attending the elementary school, St. Casimir's Catholic school in Manchester, for a year and a half. I was--so, as much trouble as I was having with English, I was not having trouble with math. Math was more advanced in Poland than it was here.

Q: Yes. Yes.

A: So that--

Q: So that was good, you were ahead.

A: Yes, but people didn't like, sort of like, hearing that or seeing that here. Yes. Another thing that I was made to do was to learn how to write with the sort of American slant. So here I was in seventh grade or whatever, and I would be assigned pages and pages of letters.

Q: Oh my goodness. Just to copy?

A: To copy, to switch my writing. I don't know why that was important, but--

Q: At the time I guess handwriting was.

A: Yes. Yes. Yes. So...

Q: So how long did you stay at that school?

A: Well for a year and a half, and then I was able--I had enough English to be able to go to--to start high school. And I began taking Latin, and that was incredibly important in learning English.

Q: Yes.

A: All the--I was learning the two languages at the same time practically.

Q: Right--Latin and English.

A: Yes.

Q: And was it a Catholic high school?

A: No. It was a public school--

Q: It was just a public school in Manchester, New Hampshire.

A: Yes, in Manchester. Yes, Central High School. Yes. And then, so I enrolled myself in the college course.

Q: Good for you.

A: And when it came time to--and my--I had--my mother's cousin was very supportive of my going to college. My parents were not interested in my going to college. So there was that sort of struggle and discussion and everything, so I was glad to have that aunt backing me up.

Q: Absolutely. Were you the only child?

A: Well, I did have a sister. When I was 15 and a half a sister was born. Yes. And I'm so grateful for my parents for providing me with a sister. So of course at the time that she was born, we're talking about the '50's, it was a great embarrassment to be out with her, because obviously people would assume that she was mine, my own child.

Q: You were just a teenager though.

A: Exactly, exactly. And I so much wanted to fit in--

Q: Right. Exactly.

A: --and that certainly wouldn't be a good thing to--situation to find myself in.

Q: So was it difficult to assimilate at that point? I mean, did you find even in the Catholic school people were not accepting of you, or what did you face there? Besides the English and being great at math.

A: Yes. I mean, I did feel odd for some of the reasons that I mentioned. I started sort of cutting--my mother was resisting, I mean, she sort of like loved my hair. She wanted always to braid it and to arrange it on my head.

Q: Right. That was the style.

A: Yes. That was the style to which she was used to back in Poland. I insisted on sort of like, chopping it off bit by bit. And then came all the curlers and sleeping on them at night and everything. And my hair is very fine and very straight so that never worked very well. [Laughter]

Q: So that was a challenge.

A: Yes.

Q: That was definitely--and did your family keep most traditions from Poland? How did that work for you--

A: Yes.

Q: --and did you find a community that was welcoming?

A: Well, the community--the Polish community, I mean there was a--other people who came here at the time that my dad did, or else relatives that had stayed here. I mean, because when my grandparents came here to work, my grandfather--my father's father--was one of 18. So I mean they were coming from hunger and just aside from him, just many many others in the family came here, and they--most of them stayed. Some of them went back as he did, but many of them stayed. So there were those relatives here. So there was the community of relatives, there were the people that came with my father, there were the people that came from Germany who had been in the work camps there, the displaced people. DP's, I guess they were called.

Q: Yeah, DP camps. Right.

A: Many of the people were sort of unmoored and doing a lot of drinking and that sort of thing. So I did not want to partake a whole lot in that. I mean, I was--I landed in those situations obviously, but it's not something that I felt akin to, or--

Q: You didn't relate to that as much.

A: Yeah. Yes. So.

Q: But your family kept a lot of traditions--

A: Yes. Yes. Like Christmas and others. Some of them were--fell by the wayside, because you sort of like need a certain environment for it.

Q: Yes. To encourage it.

A: Yes.

Q: And the cooking and your family traditions, you pretty much continued, or--?

A: Yes, the cooking, yes. Very much around Christmastime particularly, my sister, who now lives in Maine--actually I'm going to be off on Saturday to visit with her--sort of continue with making the pierogies and the kapusta and all the various traditional dishes. And my husband, who is not Polish, and my sons wouldn't have it any other way. [Laughter]

Q: They enjoy the traditional--

A: Very much, yes. Yes. Yes.

Q: Yes. And do you cook that way still? Have you become more Americanized or do you still keep some of that?

A: Well, no, I guess I've moved into--I love sort of trying new recipes and everything and that's what I've been doing all along, but I mean there are some Polish dishes that get made every so often.

Q: Yes. Yes, for sure.

A: But certainly around Christmastime.

Q: Yeah, the holidays. Yeah. And so how did you eventually get to Newton? What was the path after New Hampshire?

A: Well I went to college, University of New Hampshire, because it was cheap and it was--I could get there.

Q: Right.

A: And another thing that I sort of pat myself on the back about was that given that my parents, or my father, was not very supportive of my going to college, I remember having sort of a big to-do with him saying "I don't want a dowry. I want--I'd rather have some money for college." But what I did is probably with the help of the counselors and everything, I went to banks--

Q: Really...

A: Downtown, yes.

Q: That's impressive.

A: Yes. And I presented myself and I applied for scholarships. And so I pretty much went to college on scholarships.

Q: That's great. That's unusual for a young person to do.

A: Yeah. Well--

Q: That's really amazing.

A: Yeah. I'm just sort of like proud of having done that.

Q: Yes! You should be! And what did you major in in college? What were your interests there?

A: Well, I wanted something that would get me a job.

Q: Yes.

A: So it was medical technology. I mean, that was a sure future. My love was actually maybe history or social work, but that--

Q: It was impractical.

A: That was impractical. I wasn't able--I mean, I did try taking a couple of courses in that arena, but I could not read fast enough. I enrolled myself in a fast reading course.

Q: Yes, speed-reading. It was very popular.

A: Speed-reading, but it didn't work. It didn't work for me.

Q: Right.

A: I mean, I love words, and I like taking my time and maybe thinking about what I'm reading.

Q: Right.

A: And so, I mean, for that reason or whatever reason I steered towards sciences.

Q: Right.

A: Yes.

Q: Right. And did you meet your husband in New Hampshire, or when did you come to Massachusetts?

A: It was much, much, much later. So I--in order to keep sort of like paying for school--

Q: Yes.

A: --I sort of agreed or enrolled in a program at Mary Hitchcock, this--in Hanover, New Hampshire, which paid for my last year of college if I would work for an additional year at the Mary Hitchcock Hospital. And my last year was training in the laboratories, as a--

Q: Okay, great. And they paid for you to finish, which is great.

A: Yes. Yes. So after that was completed, I came to Boston along with some friends who were in the program. And so I worked in bacteriology at Beth Israel Hospital for a while.

Q: Interesting.

A: And then I took a job doing research in a laboratory, but it wasn't satisfying in the end, so I returned to school. I went to Wheelock, and earned a degree or Master's degree in early childhood education.

Q: Great.

A: Yes. But then it was difficult to find jobs, this was 1977.

Q: Okay. Sure.

A: However I did get a position at the Quincy School as a sort of like a resource coordinator. And I just loved it. Yes.

Q: So you really found your niche.

A: Yes. And it was all through grants, government grants.

Q: Right.

A: So people helped me write them and so I think I remained in that position maybe for a couple of years. Eventually I went--I worked for the Boston School volunteers, and I was a coordinator, so like enrichment coordinator and coordinator in District 6, which was parts of South Boston and Roxbury and that area.

Q: Yes.

A: When did I meet my husband--it was 1974...at a party. I was into photography also by then, and he was doing photography. And so my husband is Herbert Gish and he has a PhD in math and we have had a very nice life together.

Q: That's wonderful! And where was he from? Was he from this area?

A: He's from actually Brooklyn.

Q: Okay, yes.

A: But he'd been living in Boston for quite some time. I mean, he came--he went to Syracuse then he came to Harvard.

Q: Right. So that's how he ended up here.

A: Yes. Yes.

Q: That's wonderful.

A: And he was divorced, or he is divorced, and so I'm the--proud to have two stepchildren, aside from our own two sons. And one of the stepchildren, Jason Gish, has two daughters who are my grandkids.

Q: Fabulous

A: I'm their babcha.

Q: That's wonderful.

A: And they live here in Newton, so--

Q: Oh, how great. You get to see them!

A: Yes. Very, very often, yes. Not so much now because the girls are 11 and 8.

Q: Busy.

A: Busy, busy. [Laughter]

Q: And did your children grow up here in Newton?

A: Yes, they did. Yes.

Q: And what was their experience? I mean, obviously different, but--

A: Very, very different, yes. So--

Q: So they're true Americans.

A: They're true Americans. And I'm sort of like sad--well, it was a practical, not solution, but a practical decision--

Q: Yes.

A: --to--for them to learn English. So, I mean, other than some little ballads or whatever in Polish that they can still recite, I did not teach them Polish. And in a way that's a sad thing, but they--I just did not want to sort of like throw up barricades between them and their father.

Q: Right. Of course.

A: So that was the decision, but at this point obviously they wished that they had that--

Q: They still can learn it!

A: Yes. Well, Polish--

Q: It's not easy.

A: Polish, it's not like learning Spanish.

Q: No, no, no. It's not Latin-based. Did you ever go back to Poland and take them, or--?

A: Yes. So I did make like three or four visits before taking them. And we all went to Poland in 2012, so they were already quite, quite grown.

Q: That's pretty recent. Yeah.

A: And since then I've been returning pretty much every year. And on some of those trips my husband has come along. We are planning to do--for a quick visit later this year, in October. We're actually going with a group to Italy, but then we'll stop in Poland for a few days.

Q: And you still have family there.

A: And I still have family and we stay with the family.

Q: Wow. That's wonderful. So what earliest--what's a wonderful childhood memory from being there, since you didn't come here until you were much later--much older.

A: Yeah. Well, just I suppose being so like, surrounded with family members. I mean, we--my mother and I, my father was in the United States--lived with the--with my grandparents and two aunts for a while. I mean, this is like a three-room place, but four different sets of--

Q: Family.

A: --family living there.

Q: Sure. Sure.

A: So the kitchen would be the living room, it would be the dining room, it would be the bedroom for my grandparents.

Q: And the chickens there, too.

A: Yes. And the chickens would be in and out of the hallway, yes.

Q: You mentioned the chickens! Sure. Sure. But that nice feeling of an extended family.

A: Yes. Yes. And it was just sort of like a very warm environment. I mean, my grandfather sort of like stepped in and he was not--illiterate. His own father had been literate, but he himself--

Q: Didn't have that chance.

A: He didn't have that chance.

Q: Right.

A: But he taught me to draw a stick figure, he taught me my left from my right.

Q: Very important.

A: Yes! And when I'm ever confused about that, [Laughter] I place myself in the kitchen or in that multitask room and I position myself in a particular way, and I know my right from my left. [Laughter]

Q: It's amazing what you remember. Yeah. That's amazing. And when you did come, was--the difficulties of being the only one, and the English, and the styles, and the people--but was America what you expected? Your thinking about it from Poland, did it end up being what you expected, or different, or what your vision was of what you were going to?

A: Well it was just very confusing more than anything, really. And I mean it's not something that I wanted to do. I did not want to come to America necessarily.

Q: Right.

A: I mean, I was 13, I had my eye on a boy in the village. And it was sort of like a first crush or something and I was sort of like all wrapped up in that. But--and I had a father who was a stranger. I mean, it's not--

Q: Yeah. Right. You didn't know him really.

A: Yes. And I mean of course he wrote and he sent packages and stuff, but still. You're comfortable sort of like where you are. I mean, perhaps in the earlier times there might have been starvation or whatever. At the time that I was living, I was provided pretty much with what I needed. I mean, of course my needs were very, very circumscribed, but that was fine because I didn't know any different.

Q: Yeah. It was modest, and it was fine.

A: Yes. Yes. Yes. I mean...

Q: So coming here really must have been very confusing.

A: It was very confusing, yes. And it took a long time to just sort of like feel comfortable. And it was actually when I was 27 and I went to Poland for the first time, returned to Poland for the first time, I realized that I had made that transition. I wasn't sure up to then, actually.

Q: You still thought of that as home in many ways, no?

A: Yeah, I didn't know where I sort of like truly belonged. Yes. And I remember going back and feeling a little sort of put out by the sort of like the hovering of the family. [Laughter] I had gone--sort of outgrown that or whatever.

Q: Yeah. Sure.

A: And--but there, I guess you don't outgrow--I mean, it's not a matter of outgrowing it. I mean, the family is very intensely involved in your life. And so I remember that sort of like grazed me the wrong way. So I knew that I had sort of like gone over the fence.

Q: Yes. Yeah. You grew up. It's so interesting. And what did you feel as far as traditions you've maintained or started new ones with your family?

A: We pretty much started new ones here. I was fascinated when my now stepsons--my husband is Jewish--went through preparation for their Bar Mitzvahs. We had--actually it was the Foxes, I'm trying to remember, Sharon Fox or Cheryl Fox, and Everett Fox.

Q: Oh yes, he wrote that famous translation.

A: Yes, yes. Well this was prior to his--to that work of his.

Q: Yes.

A: He--they were--Everett Fox worked with...or no, it was actually his wife who worked with the kids during their preparation, with David and Jason during their preparation. And Everett actually would meet with the parents and I would tag along with my--we weren't married at the time.

Q: Right.

A: And I was just fascinated and just sort of like just taken with the sort of Jewish way of sort of like arguing with God and just sort of like standing up to God and everything.

Q: Right. Right. The debates. Right. Right.

A: That was so unlike the religious tradition that I was brought up in. Just subsuming yourself to all the Catholic rules and everything

Q: Right. Obedience. Sure. Sure.

A: So that was just fascinating to me and it just really engaged me. I mean, not enough for me to sort of--what do I want to say--adopt Judaism as such.

Q: No, no, no. You weren't changing teams at that point.

A: Yes. Right. [Laughter] But so...

Q: But so there were new traditions with the family that--

A: Yes. Yes. Yes. So we--at our house we pretty much--I mean we are not, neither my husband nor I are religious, I ended up not being religious--but I mean we do celebrate some of the traditions, the more significant traditions.

Q: So you combine them with your traditions?

A: Well, not--we don't necessarily combine them. I mean, we--in our home here, it's more sort of like some of the Jewish traditions, particularly with the granddaughters coming along, there's more of a sort of community around that and it's situational in part. The--some of the Catholic-associated traditions I mean we do at my sister's in Maine. But it's mostly around food. I mean we don't go to church.

Q: And Christmas maybe?

A: Yes. Yeah. So...yeah. No, I mean I am lucky to have a very nice life. Yeah.

Q: And you found Newton to be a welcoming place?

A: Oh my heavens, yes. Yeah. I mean, well, particularly once the children arrive and you take them for walks or whatever, for strolls in their little carriages and everything and you make new friends. Yeah, so...

Q: And where in Newton are you? What community are you part of or do you--neighborhood, or--?

A: Well, yes, well, a couple of communities now. The gardening community.

Q: Oh, that's great. We're The Garden City.

A: Yes, yes, yes. So I'm one of those volunteers who gardens in Newton Centre and here and there around town. And also I'm very involved in learning Spanish, so for the past many, many years--it's very slow progress, unlike when I was learning English. And so there's three groupings every week that gets together for conversation. I'm at the intermediate level--

Q: That's great.

A: --and I just love all the people. So it's a social circle as much as around Spanish.

Q: That's wonderful.

A: So...yeah. So I'm not sure whether I'm giving you what you're looking for.

Q: No, no, no, it's not--it's wonderful that you're sharing all this experience. Okay. So is there anything else we haven't covered that you would like to share just about coming to the country, being in Newton, raising children here, anything you miss about Poland that you didn't find here? It's a long time now.

A: It's a long time. And I have lived here for so many years. I mean, what do I miss about Poland? I suppose my family there. I mean it's an incredible culture actually. I mean, Poland has through the ages been more democratic than any other country in Europe, actually. I'm finding out, doing reading now. I wasn't aware of that necessarily earlier.

Q: Right.

A: But it might have been pretty much the nobles, but there was voting kings in and kings out, which was not true of Germany or some of the other countries around.

Q: Pretty progressive, right.

A: Yeah. So....I'm sort of like proud of that heritage .

Q: That's great.

A: I'm happy to be an American. I'm happy to be living here.

Q: Yes, yes. Well when you go back you can really compare and see where you've come.

A: Yes.

Q: Where you've come from and where you've gotten to.

A: Yes, yes. And I'm sad about the sort of conservative bent that Poland is on. It seems to be sweeping the world.

Q: You're seeing this now.

A: Oh, very much so. Yeah. Which is--and it's in the last couple of years, since--

Q: Were you aware of it when you lived there before? During the '40's? Because there also were
--

A: Back then it was very much Communist--

Q: Yeah. Later on.

A: --influenced. Influenced. Well, I mean, was I aware of it? I guess I was somewhat aware of what things were. I mean, there--people were afraid of maybe being sort of--some things about people being disclosed to the government. For instance, I remember that there was a radio that the men in my family would sort of listen to. Might have been the whatever--Free Europe--

Q: Like Radio Free, yeah--

A: --yes--from England

Q: During the Communist era.

A: Yes. Yes. And it would be very staticky, it would be hidden in one of--in the corner of the house somewhere. So I do remember that, and I remember that that's something that could not be disclosed. I remember when Stalin died and sort of like the...sort of the...I mean...we were students and certainly the ideas of an alliance with Russia was very much propagated. So there was sort of like a pall that fell among the children because we're losing this very important person!

Q: So you remember that, it made a big impact.

A: Yes, I remember that. I remember that.

Q: That's amazing.

A: Yes. And...yeah. So.

Q: Anything else that you want to share? Because I'm sorry but we're going to have to--it's so interesting, really, thank you so much for sharing all this. Anything we didn't cover that you would like to tell us or that you would like to--

A: Well, I mean I've sort of like gone in circles and backtracked--

Q: No, that's life.

A: --and gone forward, I'm not sure whether--what I've left out. I mean obviously there's a life of experiences.

Q: Of course. Of course. Sure. Sure. But that's great, thank you so much.

A: Sure.

Q: Do you have some photos?

A: Well, I didn't bring photos as such, but I--

__: I'm sorry?

Q: Oh, go ahead.

A: Yes. So I brought something that on a recent trip one of my cousins had given to me. And as I mentioned earlier, even though my grandfather was illiterate, my great-grandfather was not. He was actually sort of like the sage in the village. And he had some sort of like judicial duties, even. And he wrote. And he made this box.

Q: Oh, that's amazing! How beautiful.

A: With his name and the year, which was 1901.

Q: That is beautiful.

__: What did he put in the box?

A: You know, I don't know. Maybe tobacco or something like that?

Q: That's beautiful. Very special.

A: I don't know. It is very special. It is very special. I mean, so he made this with decorations.

Q: That's beautiful.

A: And there's a bit written about him in this book. So this is actually a house that I remember in--

Q: Amazing.

A: Yes. So there was like--and this is what many of the houses looked like.

Q: Right. The thatched roof.

A: The thatched roof, yes. And sort of like logs with some sort of material to--in between. But this belonged--this house belonged to the sister of my grandfather, actually. Lubas.

Q: That's special.

A: Yeah. So. And so this great-grandfather brought some innovative things to the village. He introduced chimneys.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah. In our village. Imagine these--

Q: Early 1900's, it looks like.

A: Yes. So it would have been perhaps earlier than that, maybe late 1800's or whatever.

Q: Amazing.

A: So anyway, this is in Polish.

Q: And where did you get the book?

A: Well that's a story. [Laughter] My cousin's husband, whose, actually, friend wrote it, gave it to me. And it caused a little bit of consternation in the family because this is the only copy that they had, and he parted with it and he gave it to me. And so his daughter, the judge, always sort of like ached over that a little bit. So when we learned that, or when my husband learned that on one of our recent visits, he decided to go on the web to see if he could locate other copies.

Q: Really...

A: And he was able to locate two copies.

Q: Really?

A: One of them is from somewhere in Connecticut, which we sent for--

Q: Unbelievable.

A: --and another one from the Netherlands or Holland.

Q: Really?

A: And so--yes.

Q: So you were able to get more!

A: So we were able to get two more copies.

Q: That's amazing.

A: And so I--we gave one of those copies to this cousin, who was hoping to--who had wished that her father had preserved it for her.

Q: Oh sure.

A: And another one to a cousin's--my cousin's son, who is into--he is actually, his career, is sort of like refurbishing and--not renovating--restoring churches.

Q: Oh.

A: In Poland, so we thought that--

Q: That's wonderful.

A: --he would be interested.

__: So it's a history of the village?

Q: Fabulous.

A: It's a history of the village--

Q: That is special.

A: --of the village and the--Moderowka, is how--the Biatkowka has been subsumed into Moderowka.

Q: Yes, those three little villages you mentioned.

A: Yes. Yes. Yes. So...

Q: That's amazing.

A: Yes. Thank you so much for sharing all of this.

Q: Oh, you're welcome.

A: Really happy that you were part of this Oral History project. Thank you so much for doing it.

Q: I'm pleased to be invited.

A: And please say hello to Gisela for me.

Q: I will.

END OF INTERVIEW